**Presenteeism as social suffering – absenteeism in an Era of Resilience**
*Claus D. Hansen
Department of Sociology and Social Work, Aalborg University*

Historically, ensuring that employees turn up regularly at work (and at the right time) has been a central problem of workplace management. For that reason, absenteeism can be seen as part of industrial conflict at the workplace level where economic incentives in particular have been used to promote desired employee behaviours (Thompson 1967; Edwards 1986). Throughout Europe focus on sickness absence policies has increased in recent years coinciding with the neoliberalisation of the labour market and public expenditure on welfare goods such as sickness benefits where the overall logic changes from one of *emancipation* to *‘competition’* (cf. Taylor et al 2010; Hansen 2012).

It is in this light, the emergence of presenteeism (i.e. going ill to work despite ill health) as a research agenda should be seen (Johns 2010): sickness presence (SP) is probably as old a phenomenon as sickness absence yet it is only during the last 15 years it has been studied intensively. Whereas SP may be thought of as a necessary strategy of survival in societies with no surplus food, it becomes more puzzling in contemporary societies. In Denmark, most employees can take sick leave without economic consequences and despite this more than 70% of the work force report going ill to work at least once a year (Hansen & Andersen 2008). In this paper, SP is analysed as a social pathology and I try to answer some of the following questions: To what extent is going to work despite having pains or being ill an example of social suffering? Is SP the result of individualising industrial conflicts that would formerly have resulted in strikes or work stoppage? Does this mean that resilience (understood e.g. as the capability to work while ill) becomes a prerequisite to participate on the labour market?

Keywords: workplace, presenteeism/absenteeism, industrial conflict

Emergence of presenteeism as a research agenda -> problemet har altid eksisteret – udtryk for at nu er disciplineringen af arbejdskraften nået en ny fase hvor ikke bare fravær skal undgås men også nærvær af de forkerte grunde?

Hvordan kan vi forstå sygenærvær i den optik?

Kan vi se sygenærvær som en social patologi og en form for social lidelse der udspringer af en individualisering af tidligere tiders arbejdskampe og som et eksempel på hvordan resiliens (i dette tilfælde robusthed til at kunne tage på arbejde på trods af lidt sygdom) bliver en prerequisite for at kunne have en fast plads på arbejdsmarkedet?

Traditionally, a central problem of labour management was how to ensure employees attend work instead of using every available chance to take illegitimate absences (i.e. absences unrelated to sickness).

In Scandinavian countries, going to work despite feeling ill (in the literature termed sickness presence) is just as prevalent as in countries with quite different welfare state and sickness insurance regimes. This is somewhat puzzling because the economic incentives for this practice have been reduced quite substantially. In other words, people go ill to work not out of pure economic necessities but mainly for reasons completely unrelated to this not seldom also because they associate this type of practice with something honourable. At the same time, recent developments on the labour market have led to a profound interest in measures that enable sick-listed to return to work as soon as possible despite not having attained full work ability again. From a macro perspective, this tendency can also be seen as presenteeism.